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GENERAL CONFERENCE.

REPORTED FOR ZION'S HERALD.

[Dr. Durbin was preceded by Bishop Soule, whose speech will be found on the last page.]

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, May 29.

Dr. Durbin rose, and alluded to the disadvantage of his position in making an after dinner speech; but as it could not be avoided, he would make the best of it. If he could secure the attention of the Conference, he would try to remove some erroneous impressions of which he thought had been made in the course of this debate. The first remark that he made was, that in regard to the statement of George Longstreet, that in the early church the aggression of Popery had always been the cause of poor and steadfast minorities. What was the application of this remark? Did the brother mean to say that the action of the M. E. Church in regard to slavery in any way resembled the growth of Popery? Or did he mean to say, in this age of the world, and in this country, that the interests of society, whether civil or religious, are safer in the hands of the minority than of the majority? Sir, the voice of history does not say so. The institutions of our country do not say so. The brother will not go before the world and say so.

The brother had also stated, very broadly, that the legislation of the M. E. Church on the subject of slavery had always done harm! So, then, the objection is not so much against our action in this case, as against the uniform action of the church on the general subject. Sir, I wish I could go before the world, and to the bar of God, with as clear a conscience and as firm a trust in regard to every other part of our legislation as in regard to our action on slavery. But we are told again and again that we are called here to judge of the laws of sovereign states;—that in the case of Harding—and in every similar case—we must be judges of law,—a business with which we have nothing to do. Nay, more, sir, we are told that in the vote on Harding's case, this body not only acted above the law of the land but above the law of Methodism—that we voted to sustain, not the Discipline of the church, but simply the usage of the Baltimore Conference. I have heard this repeatedly on this floor, and have seen it repeated in print; and I fear that the public mind has really been misled by these statements. It is utterly untrue. But, sir, I desire a whole statement. It is utterly untrue. It is unjust, both with regard to the Baltimore Conference and this General Conference. The sole question we had to judge of in Harding's case was,—“Whether it was practicable for him to emancipate his slaves?” It is today found, sir, that it was practicable. On that ground, and on that ground only, in full conformity with the provisions of the Discipline, we voted against the motion to reverse the decision of the Baltimore Conference. We could not do otherwise, sir, with the Discipline in our hands. I did not vote, nor, I believe, did my brethren in the majority, to sustain the usage of the Baltimore Conference, but to sustain the laws of Methodism.

We are told that the north have been repeatedly taunted on this point, with differences of opinion on the subject of slavery. Sir, whatever other differences of opinion there may be among us, on one point there is none. Our minds, hearts, and feelings, are all united on this point at least,—that the Episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church ought not to be tampered with slavery.

On that point, sir, our minds are as the mind of one man, and the brethren of the south will find it so. Nor is this any sudden purpose. It is the ground we have always held, and we shall be found standing up for it, shoulder to shoulder, to the end of the battle.

We have also been told, sir, that the early Methodists, in their protest against slavery, were furthering the Christian apostle's words. “Now, sir, we do not hold arguments with them.” Now, sir, we do not do so regard it. The venerable man who moved it does not so regard it. I am sure he does not: I know him well—he has called me “John,” sir, from my boyhood—and on the day when he offered this substitute, he called to me across the pews—“John, explain this for me.” Understanding his views of the subject, I now propose to explain it—having the opportunity of doing so for the first time. It reads,—

“Whereas, The Discipline of our Church forbids the doing of any thing calculated to destroy our Itinerant Superintendency; and whereas, Bishop Andrew has been identified with this superintendence, and otherwise, and this act having drawn after it circumstances which, in the estimation of the General Conference, will greatly embarrass the exercise of his office as General Superintendent, if not in some places entirely prevent it; therefore,

“Resolved, That it is the sense of this General Conference that he desist from the exercise of his office so long as this impediment remains.”

Now, sir, this action is not contemplated without cause. The preamble states the ground of the action clearly and distinctly, in a statement of undisputed and indisputable facts. And what does the resolution add? “Resolved, That what can be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?” Now, sir, I am sorry, that no one has proposed to conciliate their slaves in those states where the laws allowed of manumission. The action taken was too strong, sir, and in six months it was suspended, in accordance with the genius of methodism, which does not all the good she would, but all she can. The church then made a concession to the south on the score of necessity. Even the language of the resolution was, “We pass one disapprobation on all our friends, but do not advise them to abandon.” The language of 1787, when the church was organized, was equally bold. All private members were required to conciliate their slaves in those states where the laws allowed of manumission. The action taken was too strong, sir, and in six months it was suspended, in accordance with the genius of methodism, which does not all the good she would, but all she can.

The church then made a concession to the south—and these concessions have been made by the church continually, from that time to this, in view of the necessities of the south; that while the anti-slavery principle has never been abandoned, our rules have been less and less stringent, and our language less and less severe,—because experience has shown it to be absolutely necessary for the welfare of the church and the south—and these concessions have been made, while the power of the church has been continual, passing from the slaveholding to the non-slaveholding States. I trust brethren will bear this in mind.—laying stress upon Mr. Wesley's vehement denunciation of slavery, what was the declaration of the church in 1787? “We pass one disapprobation on all our friends, but do not advise them to abandon.”

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